



Citizen 13660

DRAWINGS & TEXT BY MINÉ OKUBO

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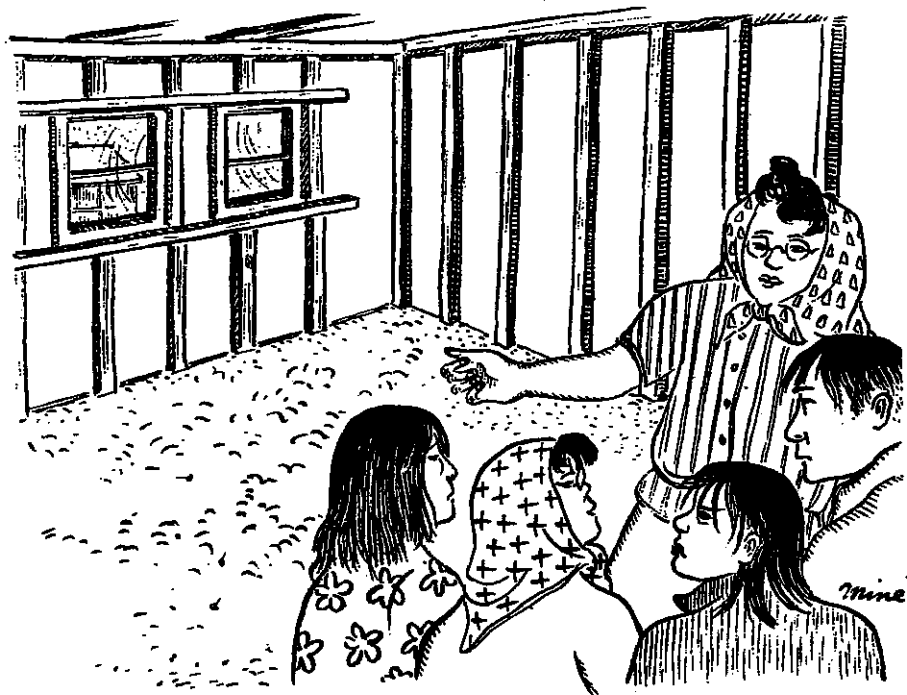
Seattle and London



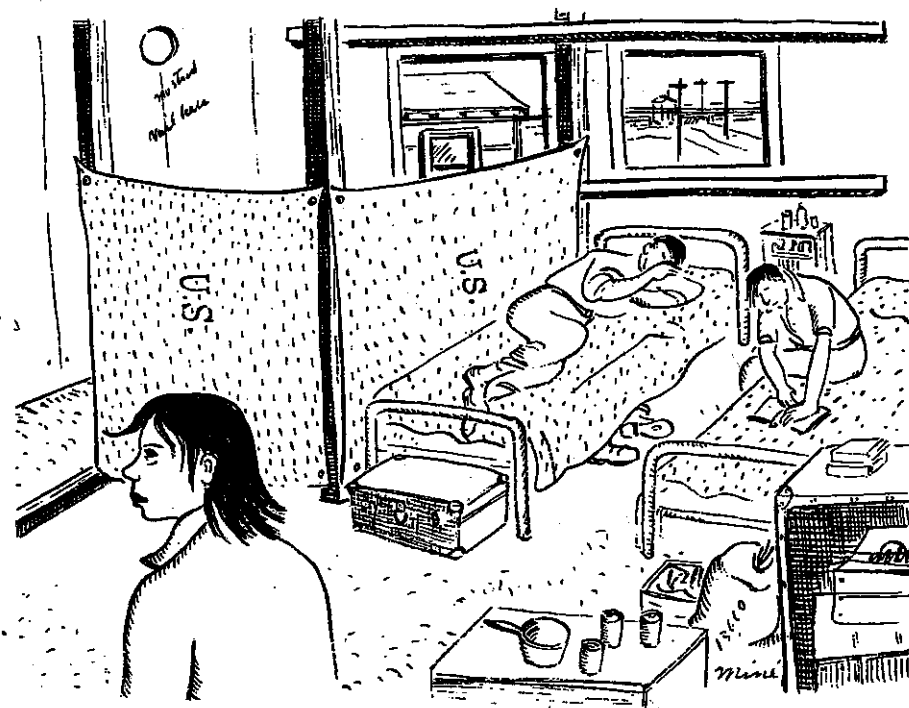
The bus struggled through the soft alkaline dirt, past the white administration barracks and the black resident barracks to Block 4 Mess Hall. This, together with the laundry building, was the induction center for the day. As we stepped out of the bus, we could hear band music and people cheering, but it was impossible to see anything through the dust. The band was a group of former Boy Scouts from Berkely. When we finally battled our way into the safety of the building we looked as if we had fallen into a flour barrel.



As we passed through the laundry, a Caucasian nurse peered into our throats with a flashlight and gave us the okay slips. We were now free to go in search of our room.



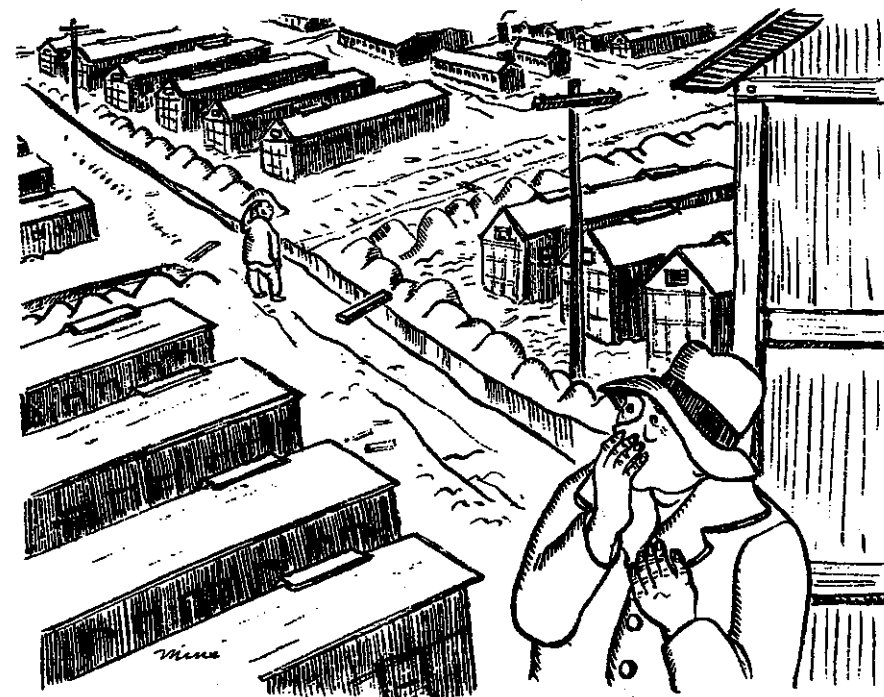
F was one of the end rooms. It was a large rectangle (about 20 by 10 ft.) and completely bare, furnished only with a ceiling light and a closet space near the door. There were two windows to the north and one to the south. A three-inch layer of alkali dust covered the masonite floor. The room was unfinished, the bare wall beams and rafters giving it a skel-tonlike appearance.



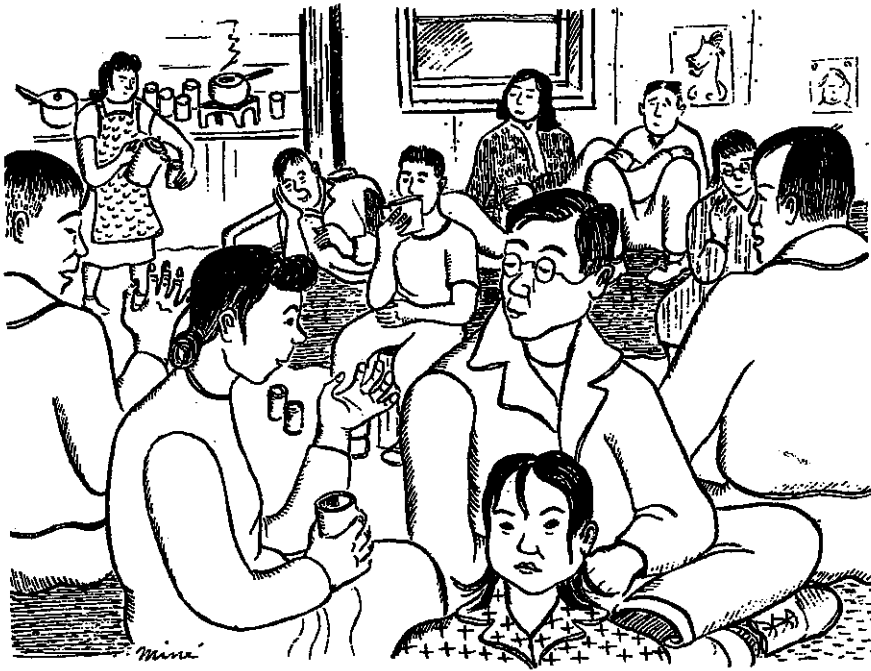
The boys used two of the blankets to curtain off a room for me in one corner.



Topaz, the Central Utah Project, was a more or less permanent center. Therefore, the evacuees looked for work immediately upon induction. Everyone wanted a job for which he had been trained or had some skill. The three of us were accepted for work on the *Topaz Times*, at the professional rate of \$19 a month, with an additional credit of \$3.75 for clothing. The other rates of pay in the center were \$12 and \$16.



All residential blocks looked alike; people were lost all the time.

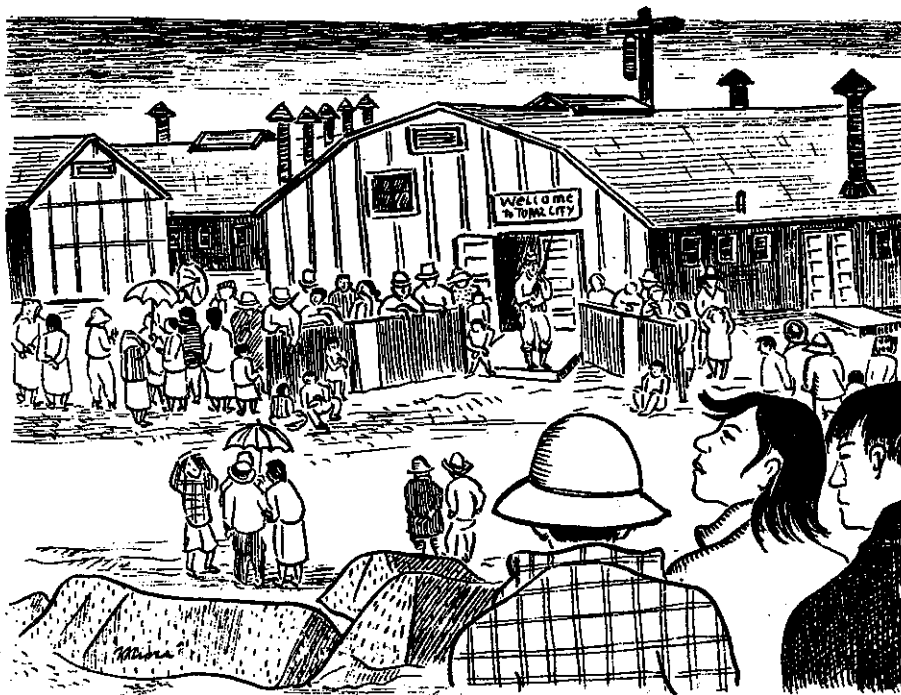


There was no privacy in our one-room home. People came and went. Bull sessions lasted all day and far into the night. We were tired of the shiftless existence and were restless.

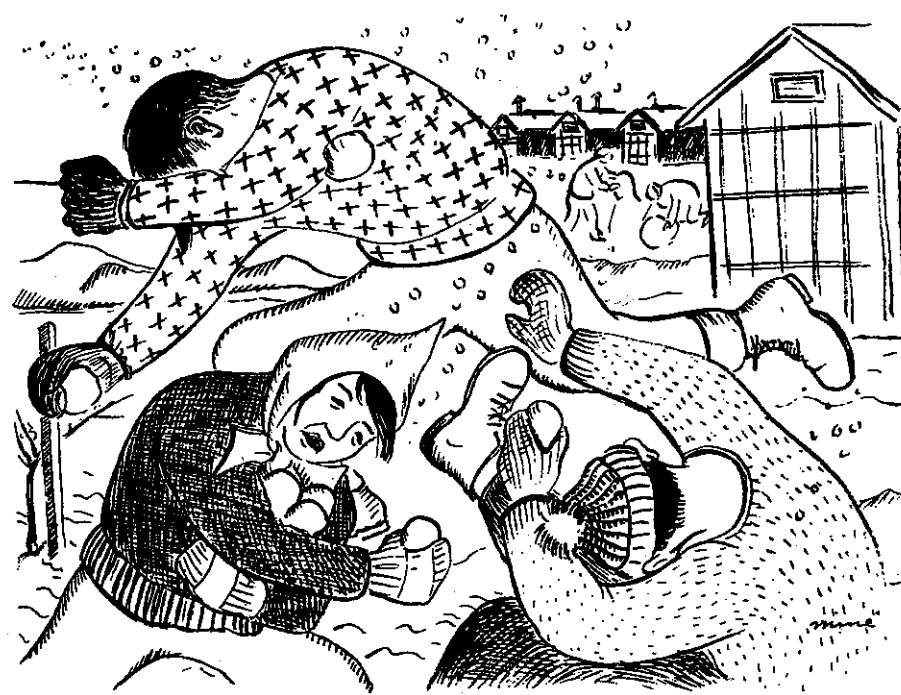
A feeling of uncertainty hung over the camp; we were worried about the future. Plans were made and remade, as we tried to decide what to do. Some were ready to risk anything to get away. Others feared to leave the protection of the camp.



Those who wished privacy went out into the wide open spaces.



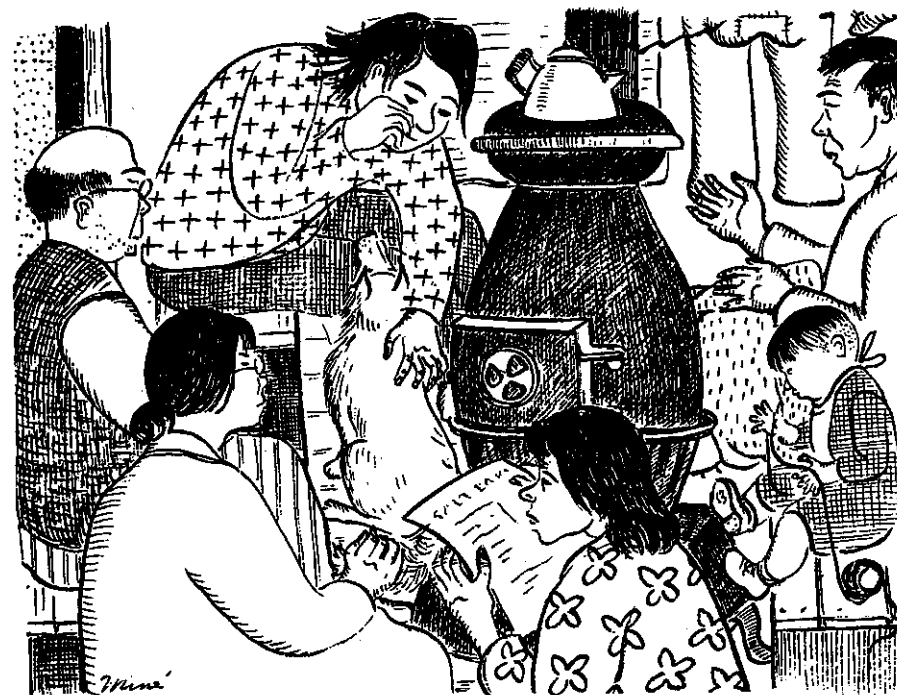
About five hundred arrivals from Tanforan were inducted every other day.



The first snow fell in Topaz on October 13. The residents went wild with excitement; for most of them this was the first experience of snow.



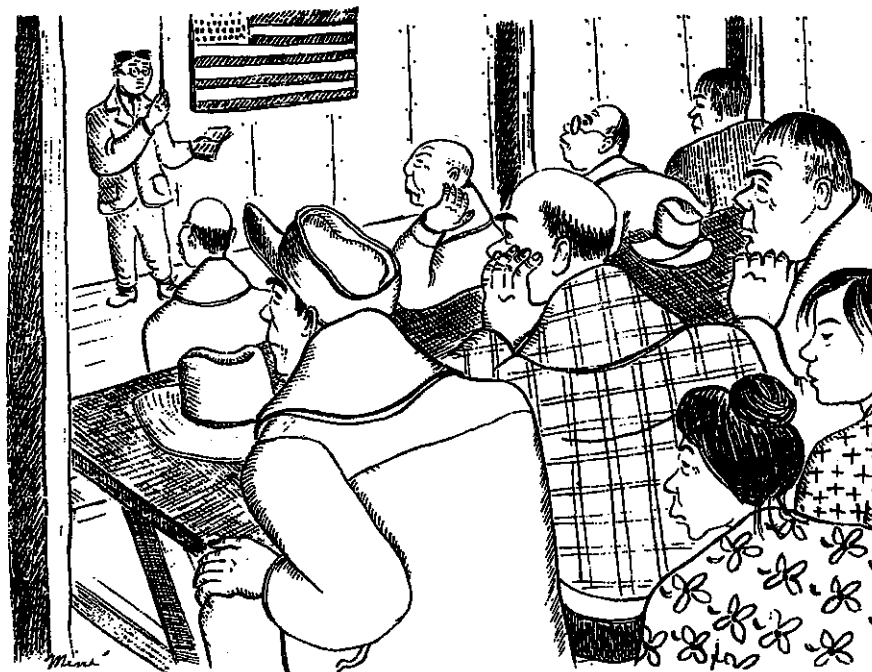
Each family was given a pot-bellied stove. Ours was moved in with me.



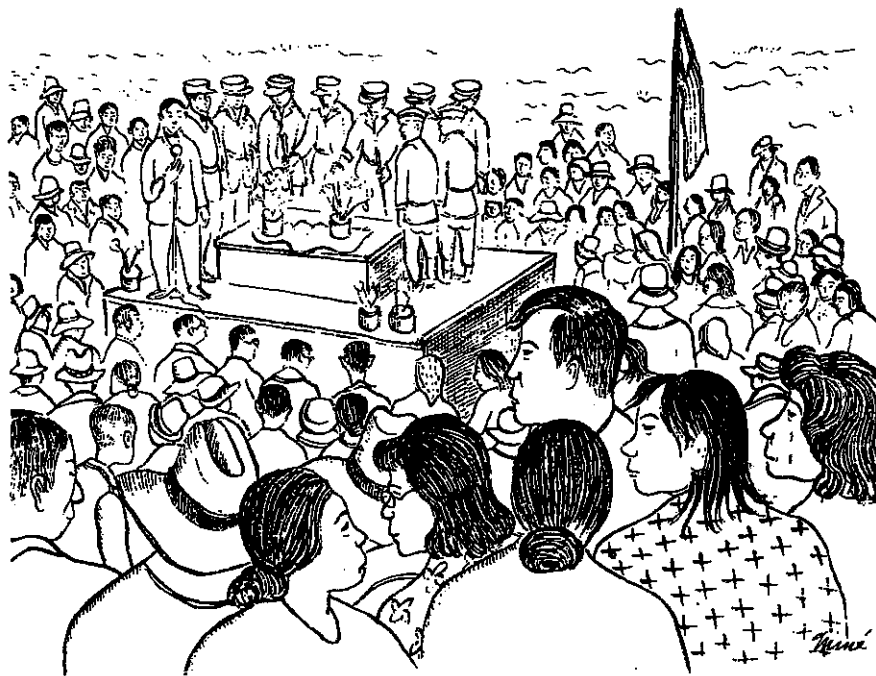
On cold days the stove centralized the family gatherings.



There was a morning and evening rush to and from the washroom, of people in *getas* (traditional wooden clogs), in underwear, in nightgowns, and in robes. Homemade *getas* took the place of rationed shoes and boots. Because of the mud puddles, some people built their *getas* a foot high.



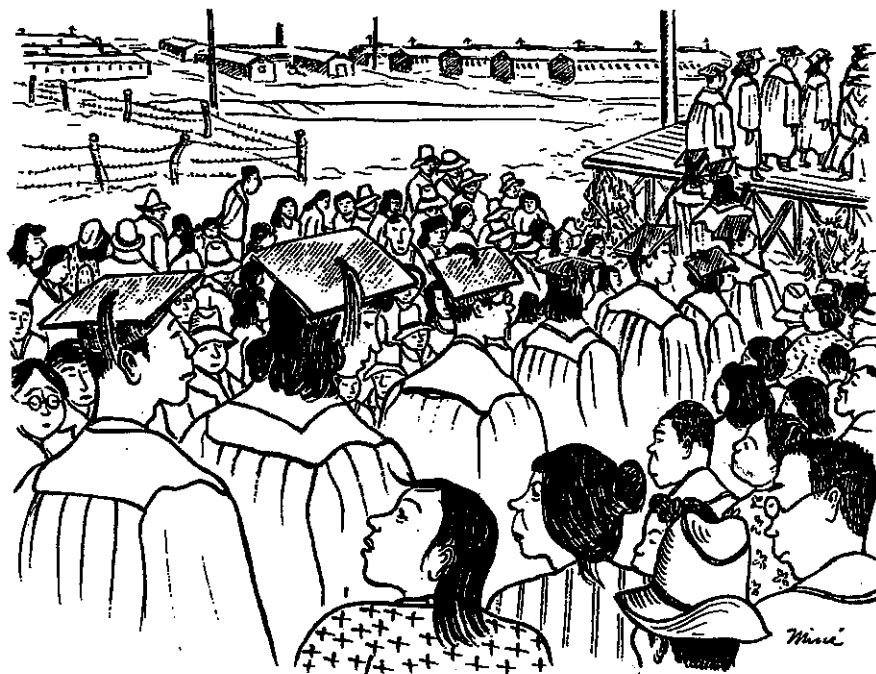
Americanization classes were organized and were held every night for the Issei.



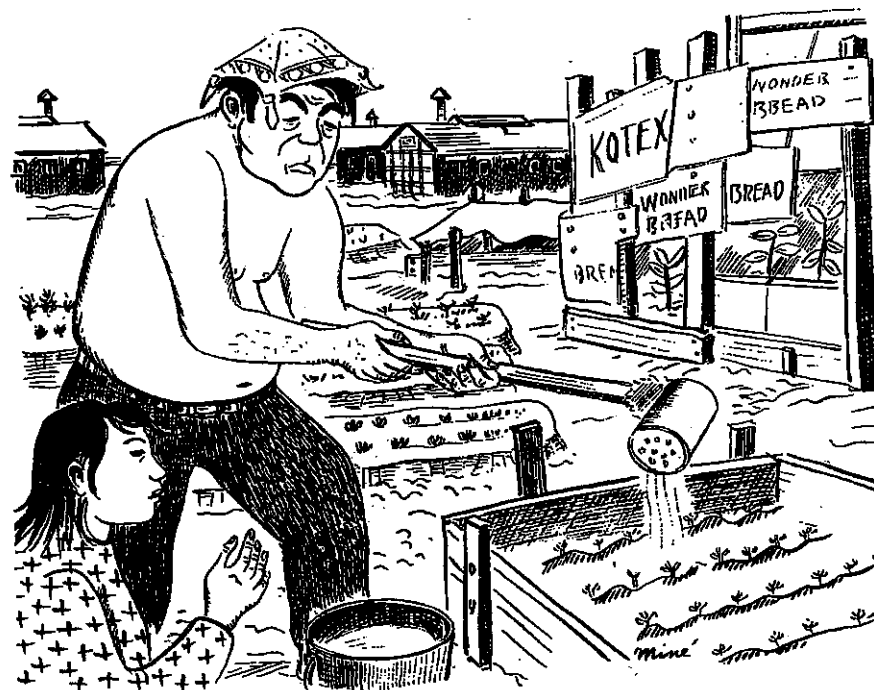
The first mass gathering in Topaz was a memorial service to honor a Japanese American soldier who died while in service. All faiths were represented, and former members of the American Legion also participated.



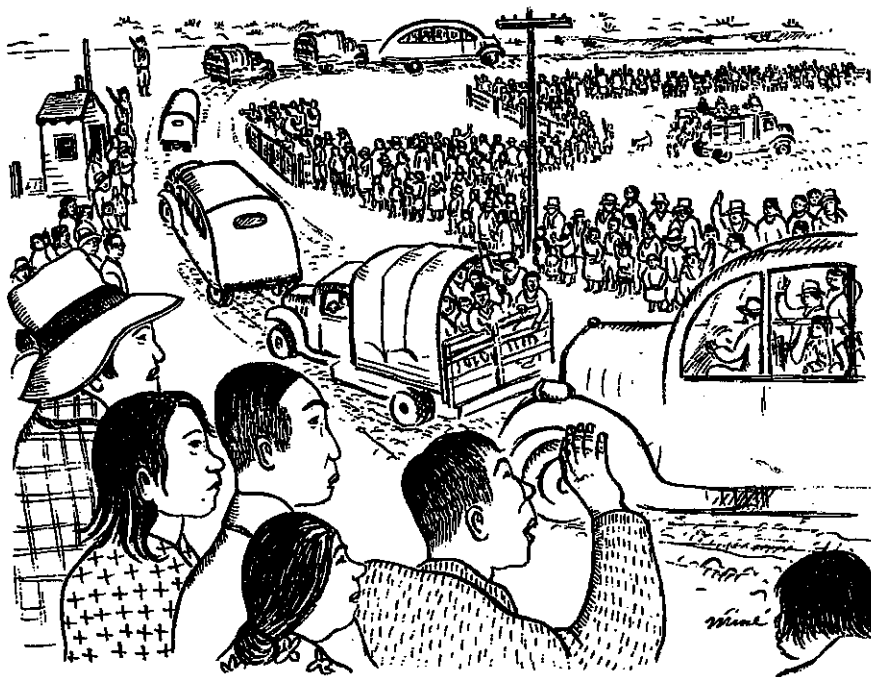
A few weeks later the Wakasa case stirred up the center. An elderly resident was shot and killed within the center area inside the fence, by a guard in one of the watchtowers. Particulars and facts of the matter were never satisfactorily disclosed to the residents. The anti-administration leaders again started to howl and the rest of the residents shouted for protection against soldiers with guns. As a result, the guards were later removed to the rim of the outer project area and firearms were banned.



There were 150 in the first high-school graduation class. Rented blue caps and gowns added much color to the large outdoor ceremony. The graduates were very serious.



Despite reports that the alkaline soil was not good for agricultural purposes, in the spring practically everyone set up a victory garden. Some of the gardens were organized, but most of them were set up anywhere and any way. Makeshift screens were fashioned out of precious cardboard boxes, cartons, and scraps of lumber to protect the plants from the whipping dust storms.



The program of segregation was now instituted. One of its purposes was to protect loyal Japanese Americans from the continuing threats of pro-Japanese agitators. Tule Lake, one of the ten original centers, was chosen as the segregation center for the disloyal. In the fall of 1943 thirteen hundred Topazians (about one tenth of the total) were sent there. The group included all who had said they wished to return to Japan; the "No, nos," that is, those who would not change their unsatisfactory answers to the questionnaire when they were given a chance to do so; all who remained under suspicion of disloyalty after investigation by the War Relocation Authority and the Federal Bureau of Investigation; and close relatives who would rather be segregated with their families than be separated from them.

[199]

Whatever decision was made, families suffered deeply.



Relocation programs were finally set up in the center to return residents to normal life. Students had led the way by going out to continue their education in the colleges and universities willing to accept them. Seasonal workers followed, to relieve the farm labor shortage.

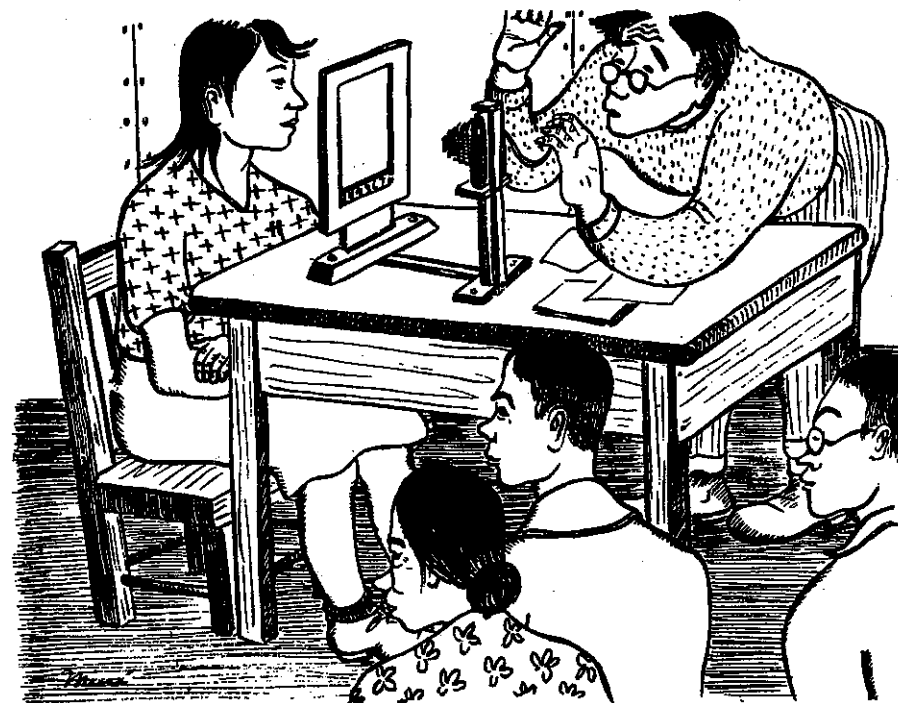
Many volunteered for the army. Government jobs opened up, and the defense plants claimed others. The Intelligence Division of the army and navy demanded still others as instructors and students. My brother had left in June to work in a wax-paper factory in Chicago. Later he was inducted into the army.

Much red tape was involved, and "relocatees" were checked and double checked and rechecked. Citizens were asked to swear unqualified allegiance to the United States and to defend it faithfully from all foreign powers. Aliens were asked

[205]

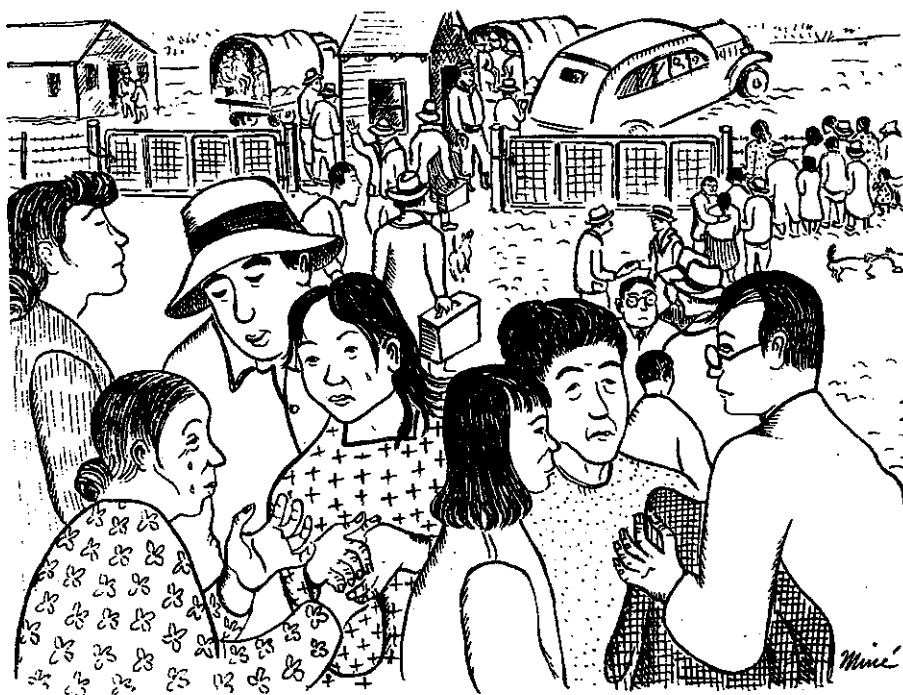
to swear to abide by the laws of the United States and to do nothing to interfere with the war effort. Jobs were checked by the War Relocation offices and even the place of destination was investigated before an evacuee left.

In January of 1944, having finished my documentary sketches of camp life, I finally decided to leave.



After plowing through the red tape, through the madness of packing again, I attended forums on "How to Make Friends" and "How to Behave in the Outside World."

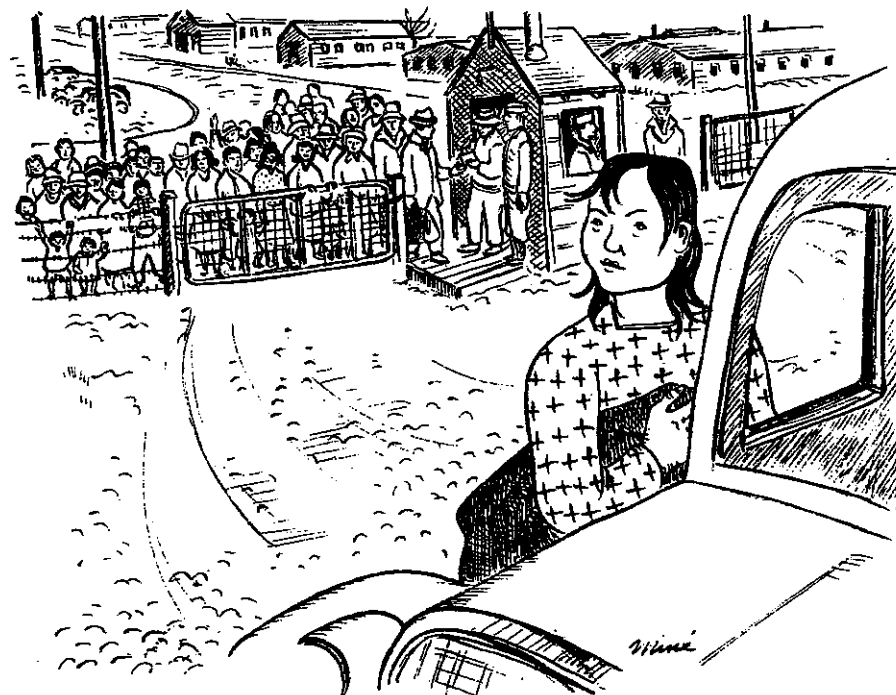
I was photographed.



The day of my departure arrived. I dashed to the block manager's office to turn in the blankets and other articles loaned to me, and went to the Administration Office to secure signatures on the various forms given me the day before. I received a train ticket and \$25, plus \$3 a day for meals while traveling; these were given to each person relocating on an indefinite permit. I received four typewritten cards to be filled out and returned after relocation, and a booklet, "When You Leave the Relocation Center," which I was to read on the train.

I dashed to the mess hall for a bite to eat, then to the Administration Office, picked up my pass and ration book at the Internal Security Office, and hurried to the gate. There I shook hands with the friends who had gathered to see me off. I lined up to be checked by the WRA and the army.

I was now *free*.



I looked at the crowd at the gate. Only the very old or very young were left. Here I was, alone, with no family responsibilities, and yet fear had chained me to the camp. I thought, "My God! How do they expect those poor people to leave the one place they can call home." I swallowed a lump in my throat as I waved good-by to them.

I entered the bus. As soon as all the passengers had been accounted for, we were on our way. I relived momentarily the sorrows and the joys of my whole evacuation experience, until the barracks faded away into the distance. There was only the desert now. My thoughts shifted from the past to the future.